

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 9, 2006

The Honorable Michael O. Leavitt
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Leavitt:

We write to seek an explanation of the decision by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to remove a website, hosted by the Department's Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), that provided basic preventative health information to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) population. We are deeply concerned not only about the loss of an important public health information resource but also by indications that the Department may have taken down the website in response to a campaign by conservative fringe groups attacking the website's existence. We ask for the restoration of the website as soon as possible.

The website (<http://ncadi.samhsa.gov/features.lgbt>), hosted by SAMHSA's National Clearinghouse for Alcohol & Drug Information (NCADI), provided simple but important educational information on health risks to LGBT individuals. The website stated the goals of the LGBT web area as to "increase knowledge, awareness, and sensitivity to the unique issues facing the LGBT populations related to substance abuse prevention and treatment," to "provide a resource area about substance abuse issues for LGBT populations," as well as to "motivate service providers, and other individuals and groups, to learn more about LGBT population," among others. The web area contained specific web pages addressing topics such as substance abuse, youth suicide, ethnic and cultural diversity within the LGBT community, social support and violence prevention, and homophobia. For years, the website has provided important information and resources to educators, health professionals, and especially LGBT individuals seeking to better understand how high-risk health and substance use practices impact them and their communities.


In its "Washington Update" (<http://www.frc.org/get.cfm?i=WA06A26>) dated January 11, 2006, the Family Research Council (FRC) urged its members to contact SAMHSA in protest of the website. It stated that "rather than warning that homosexual conduct is itself a significant health risk, the website blames society for the 'high-risk choices' that homosexuals make." On January 27, 2006, the president of FRC, Tony Perkins, sent a letter to Secretary Leavitt expressing his gratitude that the website had been removed "on or about January 21," merely eleven days after the FRC launched their attack on the existence of the website. These facts give the impression that, in order to appease a small group of extreme anti-gay forces, DHHS was willing to suppress a vast amount of simple, medically accurate preventative health information

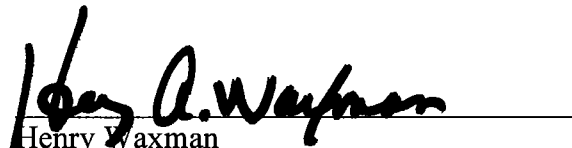
that these anti-gay elements find offensive simply because it addresses the needs of the LGBT population. We find this to be unacceptable and outrageous if true.

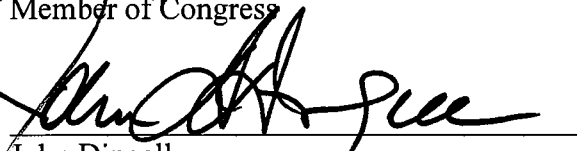
SAMHSA's stated mission is to "build resilience and facilitate recovery for people with or at risk for substance abuse and mental illness." Its vision is "a life in the community for *everyone*." (Emphasis added). As the agency's LGBT website originally and accurately pointed out, societal factors such as "stigma, alienation, and discrimination" influence the behavior of LGBT individuals in undertaking high-risk behavior, such as drug and alcohol abuse and suicide. A decision by DHHS to accede to FRC's demands at the expense of shutting LGBT individuals out of the most basic health information and services would be in stark contrast to SAMHSA's service goals.

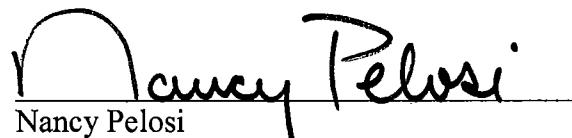
We seek your explanation regarding the rationale behind DHHS's decision to take down the website. Furthermore, in asking you to restore the website as soon as possible, we must warn against any revisions to the web content that would distort the LGBT community and its preventive health needs, such as equating "homosexual conduct" with "significant health risk." I hope your Department will take a consistent and fair-minded approach in recognizing and assisting with the unique health risks to LGBT individuals. We look forward to your expeditious response.


Sincerely,

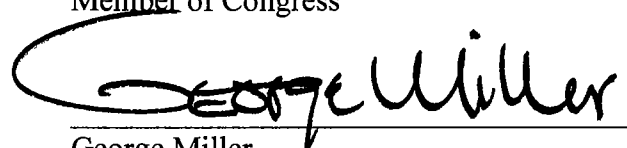

Tammy Baldwin
Member of Congress

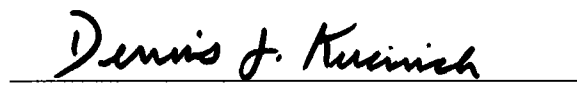

Henry Waxman
Member of Congress

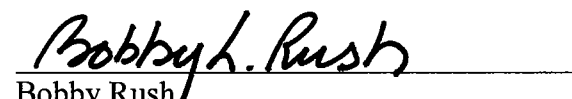

John Dingell
Member of Congress

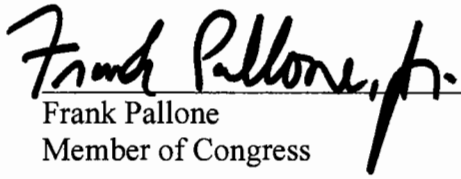

Nancy Pelosi
Member of Congress

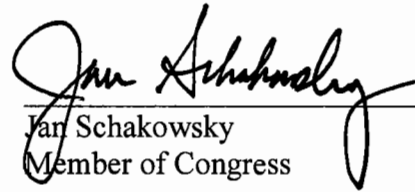

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

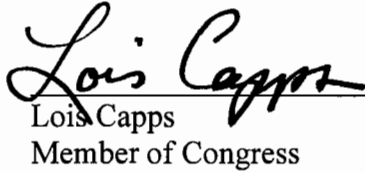

George Miller
Member of Congress


Dennis J. Kucinich
Member of Congress

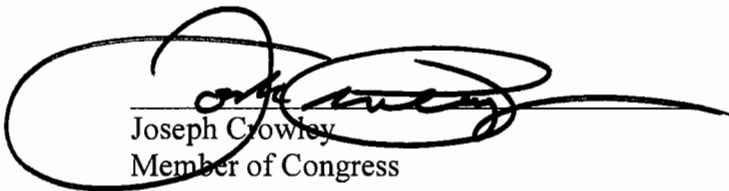

Bobby Rush
Member of Congress

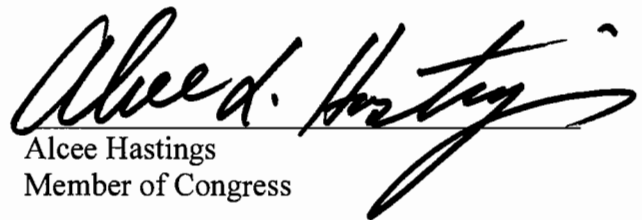

Frank Pallone
Member of Congress

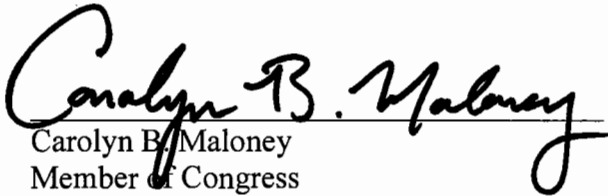

Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

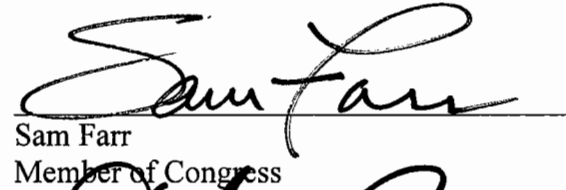

Lois Capps
Member of Congress

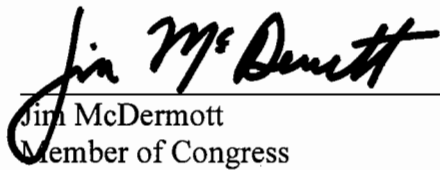

Grace Napolitano
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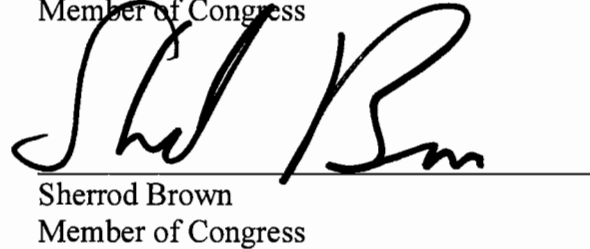

Joseph Crowley
Member of Congress


Alcee Hastings
Member of Congress


Carolyn B. Maloney
Member of Congress

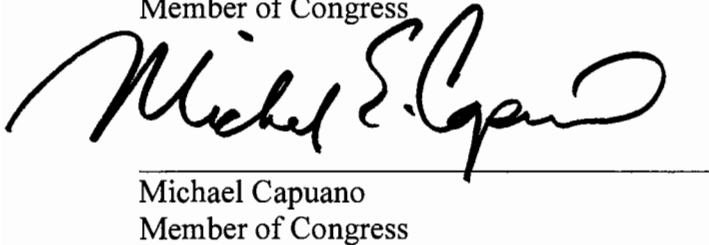

Sam Farr
Member of Congress


Jim McDermott
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Sherrod Brown
Member of Congress

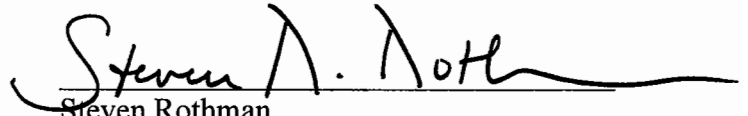

Barney Frank
Member of Congress



John Conyers
Member of Congress

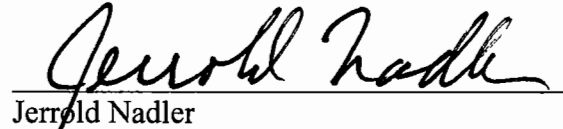

Michael Capuano
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

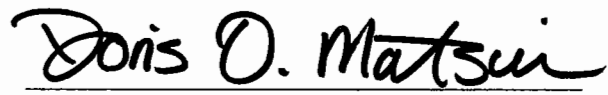

Raúl Grijalva
Member of Congress


Steven Rothman
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Diana DeGette
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Jerrold Nadler
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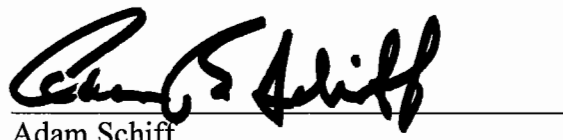

Michael Honda
Member of Congress

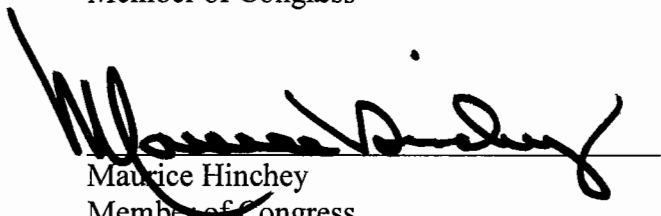

Doris Matsui
Member of Congress

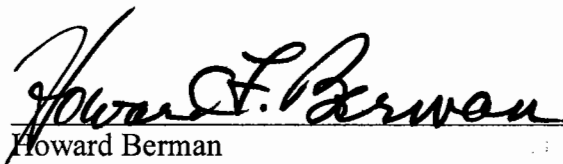

Pete Stark
Member of Congress


Peter Viselovsky
Member of Congress

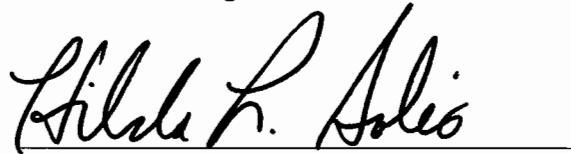

Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress


Adam Schiff
Member of Congress


Maurice Hinchey
Member of Congress

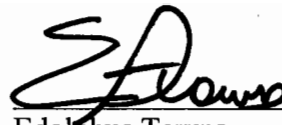

Howard Berman
Member of Congress


Louise Slaughter
Member of Congress

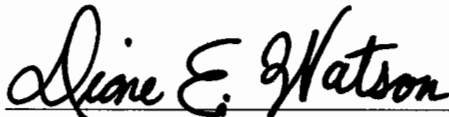

Hilda Solis
Member of Congress



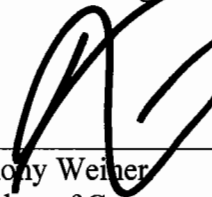
Eliot Engel
Member of Congress



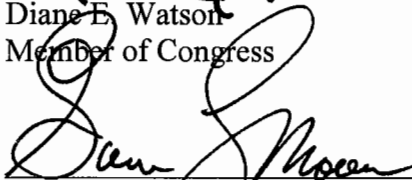
Edolphus Towns
Member of Congress



Diane E. Watson
Member of Congress



Anthony Weiner
Member of Congress



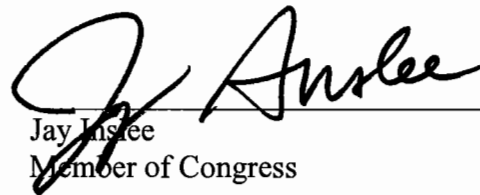
Gwen Moore
Member of Congress



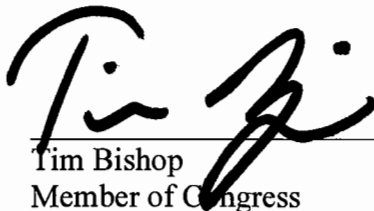
Gary Ackerman
Member of Congress



Robert Wexler
Member of Congress



Jay Inslee
Member of Congress



Tim Bishop
Member of Congress



Tom Lantos
Member of Congress



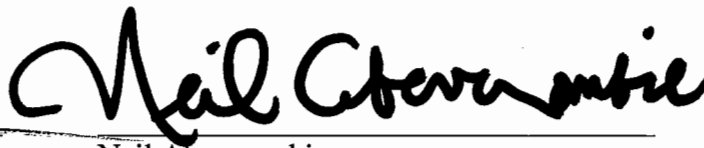
Nita Lowey
Member of Congress



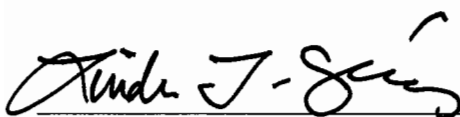
Rahm Emanuel
Member of Congress



Brad Sherman
Member of Congress



Neil Abercrombie
Member of Congress

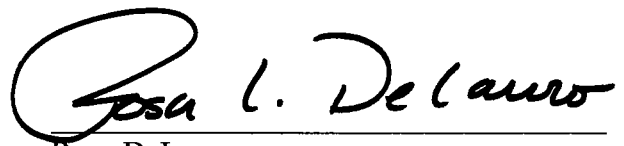



Linda Sanchez
Member of Congress

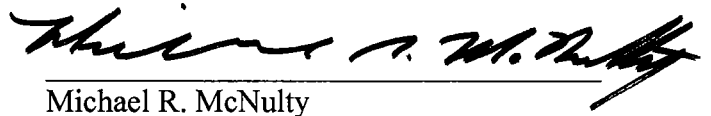



Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress


Kendrick B. Meek
Member of Congress


Rosa DeLauro
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Betty McCollum
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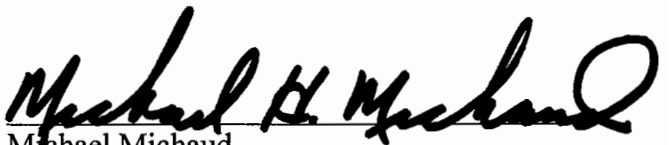

Michael R. McNulty
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Carolyn McCarthy
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Steve Israel
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Anna Eshoo
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Michael Michaud
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